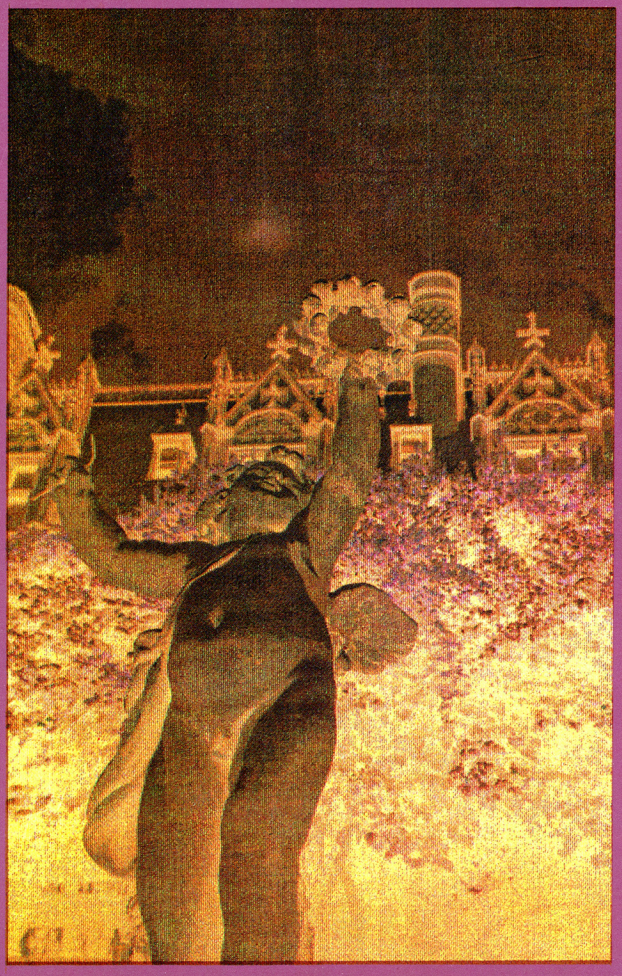
SEQUOYA REVIEW

SPRING 1991



ART, WRITING, INTERVIEWS

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Gerhard Borchers "The Shadow"

ART

INTERVIEWS

FICTION

POETRY

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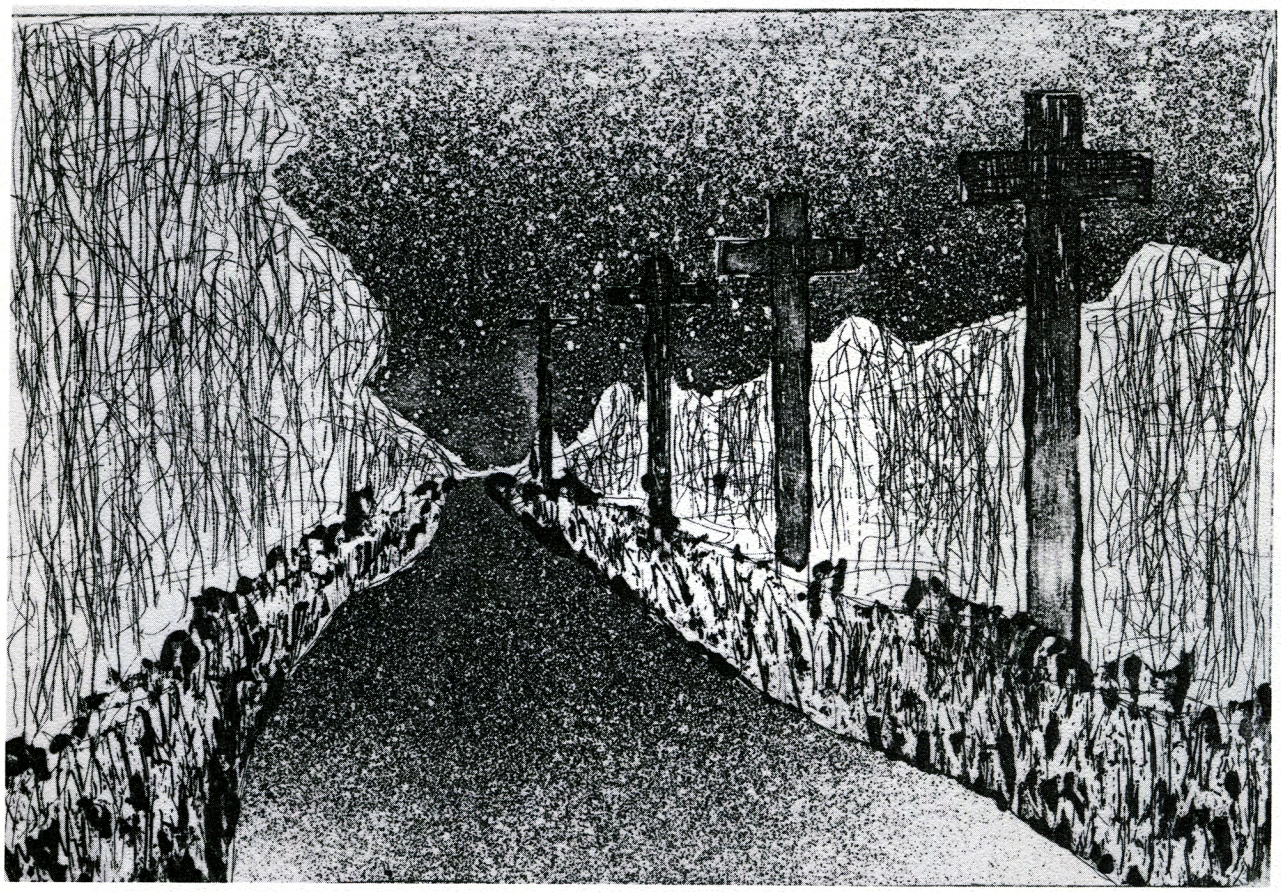

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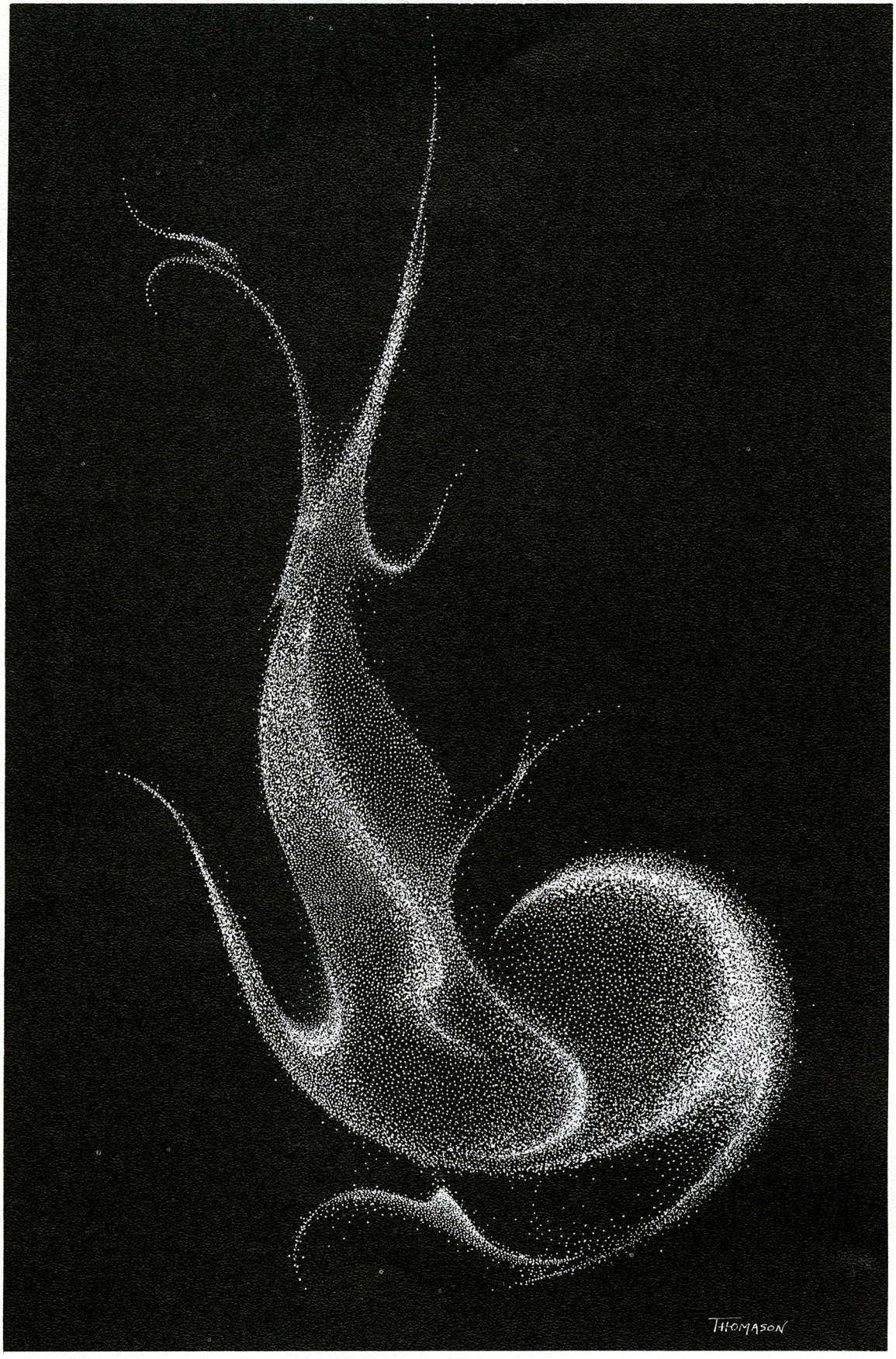

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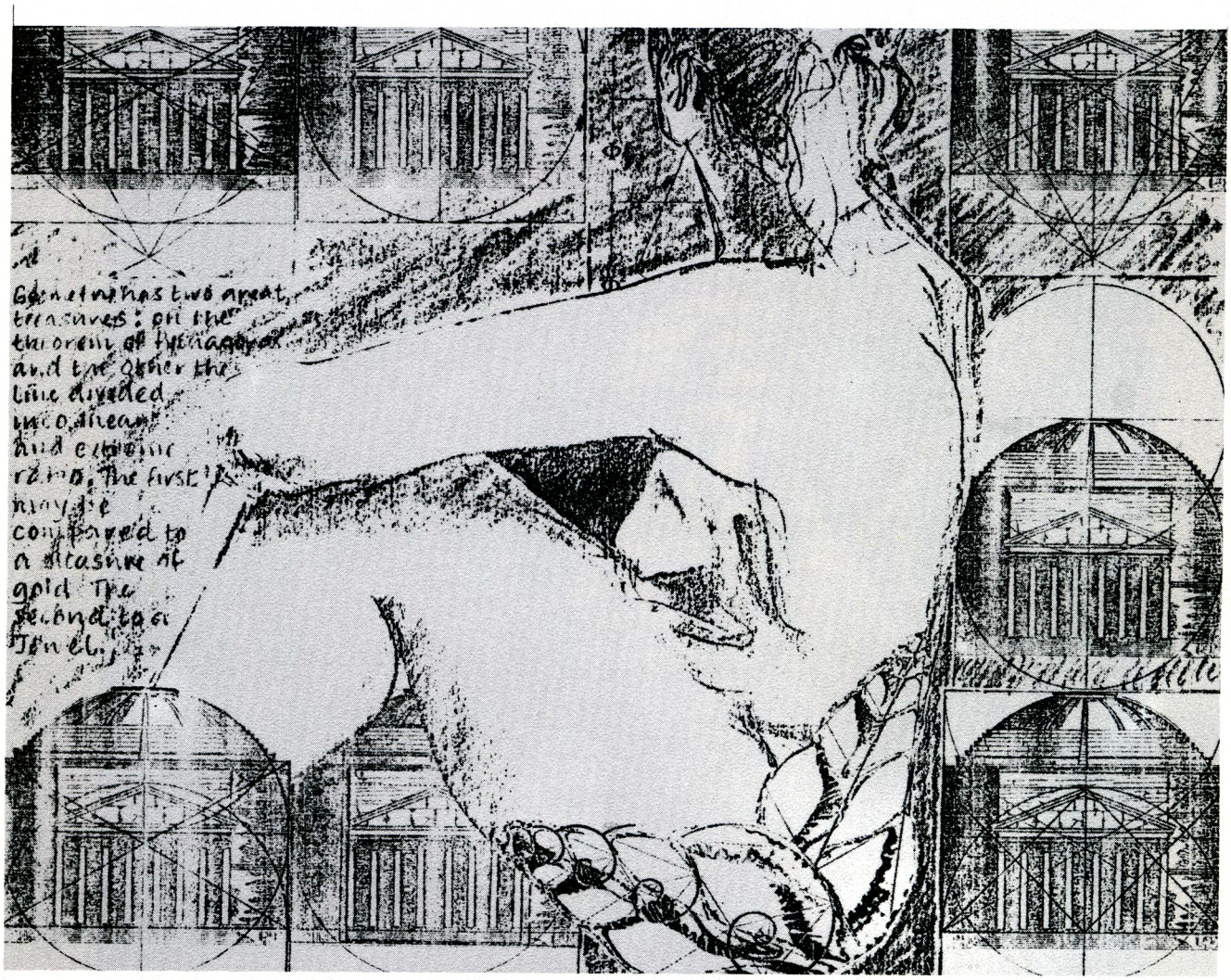

Cynthia Watson "Homage"

Sarah Wagner

PRIZEWINNER

Nana's Premier

Silence waits patiently, still hangs
in the raised louvered curtains,
focuses on your projected shadow
that solidifies into a self-decreed
goddess. Its break arrives hesitantly
from your red-painted lips, but sound
confirms itself willingly into the
audience, against gilded walls,
reverberates to the stage as a cue.
Though your singing and hint of dance
are nice, they are no competition
for another role. It is the deliberate
turn of your coiffeured head toward
the audience all in blackened space,
the way you open your blue, blue eyes,
a storm-ruffled sea of sensuousness,
as if to entice all sailors willing
to pay, and the way you open your shoulders
for the barest outline of breasts,
so perfect, not one can imagine suppressing
the wish to touch them.

Helga K. Kidder

Root Poem

Carrots on the counter, oh sweet,
I hear in your language only my name, I hear in my name
only that which I have peeled,
only that for which I've taken time

to pull from the earth, to boil,
to throw into the cellar with the old wine,
the old calendars. Potatoes, turnips:
they bring me everything,

a basket of your hair, the small bones
of your ear. For this have my hands fitted themselves
to my gloves, the old spade,
sickle, whatever contagion has brought me

to leather and dirt,
all that I've held with intent to produce,
like an ox, that which wants to be green,
that which was born to flower in the kitchen.

Bradley Paul

Glancing at me (Downtown)

If this were in Old English, or no, French,
it would sound much more elegant,
you'd hear it over and over
in your mind. You'd say it to yourself
in the street, passing strangers
with a sparkle in your eye. You'd laugh
at the man in the red tie. Everyday,
like Bush, he's making you think *power,*
assertive. Pouvoir, assertif—the words
melt like chocolate from the confectionery
you bump into, literally. The problem
is to say it with balance,
to charm the suit off this man as he catches
your awkwardness. Swerving to the side, slipping
on a wet manhole, your equilibrium
just isn't as graceful as his forgiving smile.
If he'd just offer a hand to help you up,
you'd think better of him. You'd take him
to a foreign place you've imagined for him.
You'll talk to yourself aloud and in French
until he's out of hearing. But you do know
the sidewalks—they greet you every morning
with less and less of a smile, like any family
awakened at this hour. They're saying, oh,
just you. You know they'll fall back to sleep
as soon as you're gone. They won't even miss
your pitter-patter—they know you'll be back.
The sidewalk doesn't ask questions,
perhaps it speaks in another language you
don't understand. It says, just you, no one
with a dark cloak and veil and followed by men
with flowers or guns or exotic accents. Just you who
trips. I trip everyday almost. I slip on a manhole,
stumble over the gratings, or just barely walking
into red tie. I fight it—hold my arms out
like a balancing pole or look down at my feet,
and thud! A telephone pole. You see, it's
impossible to concentrate, to know all these things
at once. Man in a blue suit and red tie, bifocals,
coming to the left. My left arm's out,
bring it in, don't slip on the manhole, watch for cracks,

telephone poles, other people's feet. Check to see
if he looks at you. Irrelevant. No, if
I could just see those dark eyes glancing at me.
If he could show some hint of a smile,
as if I were the only person he'd passed in days
the only person with a clumsiness so charming,
with an ordinariness so *exotique*.

Yvonne Hart

The Never-Ending Salad Bar

Three days later, and I've come back to the lettuce, these bowls—
call them neighborhoods—gaining the intelligence we
ascribe to planets, patterns of stars, these junkyards of
beginnings replenishing and replacing themselves before my feet.
As a few persistent stars are lit between the buildings, the clouds

move their undetectable shadows where they end above the streetlights
or skyscrapers. Between the two, airplanes carry their ripening cargo
of tomatoes, pregnant radishes. How can I fill my small self with
any of this? I shuffle my way toward the country, kicking beans,
moving to another stretch of green, shadow and shift

of wind clearing its throat. This great hemisphere overlapping others,
their union a hesitant, nervous communion waiting to be emptied
again into the same dark whole. Their tension snaps like power lines
in wind, and in stillness, the light fading and returning,
the immutable past, the inconsolable future.

Greg Delisle

Interview: Ales Debeljak

Ales Debeljak is a poet from the state of Slovenia in Yugoslavia who currently lives in New York. He is the author of several books of poetry and criticism. Ales was kind enough to give this interview to Greg Delisle during his visit to UTC's Meacham Writers' Workshop this spring.

SR: You've lived in the States for three years now, so I guess you've gotten a pretty good feel for what American writing is like. What do you think some of the basic differences are between Yugoslav or Slovene writing and American writing?

AD: The major dividing line can be drawn between Central European literature on one hand, and American writing on the other. The difference is probably in the way we see the world. It's very much a dark vision, sort of a metaphysical vision, that so many of the Central European authors harbor and exercise so skillfully in their writing, whereas in America the narrative tradition is very much present. That narrative tradition also accounts for the more, I should say, breezy approach to the world—it's as complex as in Central European writing, but it gets across everyday life in particular, routine events which are further looked into as a microcosm that can unveil the macrocosm, and that's probably what's at issue in American writing.

Of course, we're talking in gross generalizations, but just for the sake of argument, I think it's safe to say that this tradition of literature, the Western tradition of literature, can be divided into two sides, on one side the esoteric tradition and on the other side the democratic, popular tradition. Then, certainly, the Central European literature falls into the esoteric tradition whereas American literature, with the founding father of Walt Whitman (that holds true for poetry in particular) would clearly fit squarely into the democratic tradition. There are but a few American authors that write in a more metaphysical tradition, in a tradition that can "see the whole world in a grain of sand," as William Blake put it. And I think that that's something that we've adopted very much as our creative agenda, as our creative slogan. It's, of course, nothing that could be done consciously. It pretty much comes to you with the sense of history that is very much present in the countries that Central European authors come from, and when I'm saying Central European authors, I have in mind writers such as Paul Celan, Rainer Maria Rilke, Gottfried Bain, Georg Trakl, etc., that is, those fellows who wrote not only on the basis of their personal experience, but on the basis of tremendously keen insight into what it means to be human, what it means to be a mortal being in the turbulent twentieth century.

And that's something I feel is lacking in America. It probably has to do with the fact that you didn't have the experience of war on your own soil, whereas we did, as a matter of fact, have two wars on the European continent, and Central Europe was pretty much the ground that was the most trampled and the most walked upon, and divided so many times into so many states and countries, and it's something that certainly leaves a trace, and it leaves an impact on anyone who wants to try their hand at writing. Consciously or subconsciously, the history, in other words, is always there, and the sense that you always write against the threat of death, and that's something that's very present.

The kind of questions that we keep asking ourselves, embedded in the poetic that is most commonly shared by Central European authors, are preeminently philosophical questions, only we respond to them in poetic language, in poetic vocabulary, and for that reason I think that it is no surprise that so many Central European writers "committed suicide," and have been living tremendously marginal lives, because of their proclivity to raise the kind of questions that were not very popular. I think that by doing so, they maintain the open space, the space for longing, the space for desire, the space for the irrational driving forces that govern our lives without us being completely aware of them, and I think that that is something that is present to a lesser degree in America, in general, of course. One finds examples here and there. I personally value a lot the work of Elizabeth Bishop and Wallace Stevens, and some younger authors as well, but they were beacons of individual courage that were never very much imitated or emulated.

We are not only concerned, but obsessed with metaphysical questions, with ponderings of who we are, where do we come from, what is the ultimate meaning of life, and what is the current state of the human condition that gets defined and redefined time and again--these are the kind of questions that creep in, indeed, that make the very core of our writing. I see but places of this concern in American writing, only because of its tendency to speak to larger audiences, to speak to the concerns of everyday man. American poets use events and experiences of everyday life, of a routine kind of drudgery, and turn that into poetic essences, into poetic images that could speak about these ultimate questions that are quite expressively present in Central European literature.

In other words, the difference would probably be between the implicit and explicit approaches. In Central European writing, the approach to the metaphysical questions is very explicit; thus it affects and modifies the language, the vocabulary to such an extent that you are left with very concise, very condensed poetic expression. But because of the implicit presence of these metaphysical questions in American writing, there is the need for longer poems, the need for narratives, that can be branched off, but still basically stem from the kind of source that addresses the same questions, only in a different form, in a more popular, more accessible form that is easily recognizable, that displays the whole array of reference points that the reader can relate to. Central European writing leaves the writer pretty much out of it. It is closed, self-contained writing that has been done, and is still done, for a selected few. That's no highbrow notion, it's

only the fact that poetry speaks of ultimate questions, and ultimate questions are by definition the concern of a selected few.

SR: What about your own writing? How do you feel that you have developed?

AD: That's very intriguing. Due to my own experience of living in America, my most recent work is the kind of writing that is considerably influenced on the level of style by American authors. John Ashbery's work was very important to me, and so was the work of Wallace Stevens and Elizabeth Bishop, but more on the level of technicalities, in the way they turn verse into prose, how they blur the line between prose and verse, between fiction and poetry, and that was something I found tremendously liberating.

Central European writing, and Slovenian writing in particular, is very rigid, is very strict; not formulaic, but very formal, so poetry is never only an exercise of the mind, but always an exercise of your formal skills as well. I found the other side of the poetic spectrum very emancipating. American experiment in free verse, poetic prose, and prose poems was never very strong in Slovenia, or in Central Europe for that matter. They allowed me to shed the burden of discipline that I had in my writing. Until recently I was writing in strict forms myself. I was writing sonnets, and the sonnet is a form that is a must for Slovenian authors.

Basically, our literature was conceived at the initial stages as the writing of sonnets. The sonnet is something that is not only an exciting form to work with, but is something of a challenge, because it allows you to measure your own writing up to the highest standards of literature in your mother tongue. That's why the formality, the discipline is so present, because it was always with us, and it delineated the realm in which we travel as poets in our mother tongue. So my writing is still very much affected by the fact that I come from a country that was constantly torn apart, divided between many foreign masters, that never had the tradition of statehood, and it was the language, the words, the writing, that allows for the development of national as well as personal identity.

So it's something that means more to us, it's not just a casual pursuit, something that one does when one comes back from a nine-to-five shift. It's something that takes on the form of an existential vocation, it's something that you do with all your might, your flesh and bones, invest your whole personality in it. Dane Zajc [a Yugoslavian poet who visited UTC for the Meacham workshop] is a good example of how this poetry gets written--he basically lived what he wrote about.

In this sense, I feel that the very notion of poetry as witness to historic events is very much maintained in Central European writing. It is a witness to current events, not by reflecting them in a straightforward manner, but by reshaping them, digesting them, and incorporating them into the perennial dilemma of humankind. I think that that's something that makes Central European literature seem so attractive to the west and to American readers, because that sense of a poet as a witness is very much there, a poet as a commentator of what happens in your life as a person and in your life as a nation.

> ...that's something I feel is lacking in America. It probably has to do with the fact that you didn't have the experience of war on your own soil...

SR: Do you think that your poetry is growing because of this interaction?

AD: I would say so. It is getting better not only because I was exposed to the vast variety of American poetics and American literature, which of course I had read beforehand, but now I had a chance to experience the kind of culture and historic conditions that necessitates the kinds of forms that get used in American letters. That was very important to me. Of course, as a scholar, as a literary critic, I had a chance to familiarize myself with American literature, and I think that I do know it fairly well, but it was only after I had a chance to live in the country for a period of time that I was able to truly gain an insight into what it means to be a poet in America, what it means to be a poet in a culture that seems to be paying no heed whatsoever to what poets say. Which can be liberating, but suffocating in the same breath.

That was something that really helped me find my own style and my own subject matter, for instance, what I wrote in a book, *Fearful Moments* as it is roughly translated, that was published last summer in Slovenia and immediately sold out, and was awarded the Vilenica award at the Festival of Central European literature. This book basically encapsulates my response to both countries, to both traditions. It encapsulates my living in a heritage of dark visions, while at the same time adopting more liberating forms that allow for these dark visions to loosen up, to become not lighter, but certainly more accessible.

I came to realize that ultimately, poetry is there to communicate a message, and if the message is too coded, ciphered in a way that the key to enter the poetic message is available to a few readers only, then poetry loses its meaning. And I think that that was something that I learned only—well, I wouldn't say that I learned only upon coming to this country, but certainly my life in the States was very conducive to generating that kind of consciousness that maintains the historicity that I brought with me from Central Europe, but at the same time letting me gain this insight into such vast expanses in which not only no poet, but no human being, can mean anything.

And it was the very fact of the anonymity of the vast American landscape that was truly liberating. Now, that sounds very bizarre, because we think of anonymity as a suffocating kind of thing, something that taxes you, something vexing. But I think I found it very liberating because it allowed me to

be what I truly want to be, to truly exercise the variety of lifestyles, the variety of states of mind, which is not always possible in Central European countries that are narrow and limited not only by geography but by culture as well.

And the fact that America sits at the crossroads of so many different cultures was very liberating as well, to see that besides your own message, there are a number of other messages that are as valid and as valuable as your own. This was very important to me, to see how much I can engage in an ongoing dialogue with different cultures. I think that accounted for the more loose form that I've adopted in this most recent book.

SR: So, if you had to recommend one way or the other to developing writers, would you suggest that American writers read more into Central European writing and try to emulate it?

AD: Well, not only Central Europe. Of course, I can wholeheartedly recommend Central Europe because I come from that region, but I think that to get exposed to other literary traditions, to other histories, other cosmological consciousnesses, to other national traditions, is very important.

South American and African and Asian literature can also be very important when encountered from an American standpoint. When you read other literatures, you experience them on your own terms, thus changing your own identity or your own poetics, if you will.

If you are reading Central European writing with a slightly different perspective, you can contribute a lot to your own understanding of what it is that we do. You contribute to this ongoing dialogue that we as poets and writers and human beings have to engage in in order to make the world a place that is worth living in.

I think he only message poetry can bring out is that dialogue is important. That's a very peculiar thing about poetry, because poetry is usually perceived as a monologue, but many monologues drawn together comprise a splendid orchestration of voices. This is what is so important about reading a number of other literatures besides your own. It makes you a richer person, and hence a richer poet. I benefited from being exposed to American literature, so I truly believe that American writers can benefit from reading Central European literature, or South American, for that matter.

It's the appreciation of the Other, with a capital O, that poetry can bring about. Because the Other is not the other in a very mundane sense, the Other also stands for mystery and for secrets that we all crave to decipher, because the poetry can speak about our own human condition in terms that we were never aware of.

In that sort of confrontation, your true being can get played out, and I think that's the only thing that poetry can do. To allow you to come to terms with who you are, where you come from, where you go.

...if there is a language unique to women, it will emerge through this growing openness; critics and criticism can't impose a feminine language on female writers.

Interview : Pam Painter

Pam Painter is a fiction writer whose last book, exercises for writers, is called What If? *She teaches at Emerson College and Vermont College. Jenn Brown asked her these questions during the Meacham Writers' Workshop this spring.*

SR: How do you feel about women's writing? Do you think women have a different responsibility in their writing than men?

PP: No, I don't think so. Gender has never been important to me in my approach to writing. Men can write from a female point-of-view —look at *Anna Karenina*— and women can write from a male point-of-view. Many of my characters are from male point-of-view.

It's very limiting to impose certain subject matter or styles on writers based on gender; after all, what's more wonderful than trying to imagine the world as someone you're not?

SR: What direction do you think women writers are going right now?

PP: I see more women telling their stories now, being more open.

I think that if there is a language unique to women, it will emerge through this growing openness; critics and criticism can't impose a feminine language on female writers.

SR: Do you have any advice for writers who are just starting out?

PP: Well, of course, you must love writing. And reading—a writer is someone who reads. "Writing in the Cold" by Solotaross is an excellent essay for beginning writers to read, whether they're in fiction or poetry.

Workshops are helpful in developing your skills as a critic; if you can become a good critic of other people's writing, you can be a better critic of your own.

And I think good writing will get published eventually—just keep trying. More important than talent in writing is persistence.

Nothing to Devise

It begins with a drop of sweat
on my forehead that slides off my nose to land
on the floor in a puddle that is forming
between my feet. I've been fondling
the nape of my neck for hours now,
counting the hairs as they fall from my scalp.
It's at this point I realize the nature
of my loss while sleep refuses me,
at this time of night when there is not enough
light to support color. You enter the room
and fold yourself into the bed behind me, molding
yourself to match my contours
and rubbing your feet together briskly
in a vain attempt at comfort. I'm awake
but my body lies to you, and all
I can remember is the day I slept
in the park in some foreign city while you sat
chewing your fingernails, pondering the V-shaped
vein in my forehead. I'm humming
a song I thought I created, but you insist
you've heard it before. The light in the room
grows brighter as the mosquitos give up
their fascination with the bulb
and look for handouts. In a fit of desperation
I go down into the humid recesses of the basement,
grabbing all the Christmas lights
I can carry. I heap them on the front lawn
and plug them in, old mixed with new.
Just as they flame up, a lady gets off
at the bus stop across the street.
She lights her pipe and smokes coolly.
Monday has been forever altered
and tomorrow is a national holiday
that provides no shelter from the heat.

Robby Nichols

Ode to a Pear

Four Japanese apple-pears
Ripening in a brown paper bag
And thinking about the shape they're in,
Not unlike a woman
With a throng of children pressed to her
While she tries to cook,
Not unlike my second-grade teacher
Surrounded by seven-year-olds
Whining for something to do.
She would tell us to draw,
Make shapes and colors.
Industrious seven-year-olds
Roughly sketching balloons
And clouds, not me—I
would attempt the curve of branches
Cradling fruit, the wonderful textured
Asymmetrical firmness of fresh fruit,
Of fresh pears.
Pears sitting on the window sill
Absorbing sunlight into
Spotted green-yellow faces,
Until they are discovered
By a woman with ample hips
And seven children.
She takes one from the sill
Washes its rough surface
Under cool water
Trying desperately to
Wash away the marks
That nature left
On its pocked skin.

Victoria Raschke

For Heinz—Gerbergasse

This street named for animal hides
scraped and washed soft into bags
and luggage for centuries carries
our childhood. Commanded by the Bishop,
laid by French migrants these cobblestones,
soccerball, and we became friends.
In dress and apron ruffled
with wings like Hermes, I delivered
the ball swifter than Klaus
or you could with a wide kick.
Only if the town's stork flew
to his nest on the factory's
chimney, I'd stop and call:

"Storch, storch guter
bring mir einen Bruder."

Most days, we played unrelenting
or until Frau Zippelt called Klaus
for supper, admonished us it was
three quarters of five. I always
thought it strange that she could
name time I didn't understand
almost as if caught red-handed
like your father hunting rabbit
now serving behind the prison wall
we once tried to climb. German shepherds
howled when we threw rocks over
on the way to Main Street where
the church tower's clock clicked
onto narrow-gabled roofs, gave us time
to ride my mother's black bike.
We took turns pedaling, then letting
legs hang freely, balancing
on the hobbling saddle or
we hunted the gutters for gum
wrappers with pictures of soccer
players and movie stars inside.
Unobserved, I'd practice a Brigit
Bardot smile, push out my chest.
But for Vespers, I'd tag you
to the tower, watch you jump,
one rope in your hands, the other
in mine, off the stairs

to the beton floor
when the bell's resistance broke.
Marionettes on magic strings,
you were pulled up, I down,
as messengers of time
controlled by that unseen power.

Helga K. Kidder

Black Angel

A crow was bathing in the little waves
at the edge of the lake. I'm quite sure
she was bathing as she scooped
the water at her sides with her
wings that looked like the strong black fans
from Spain and quickly flapped
it onto her back and head and
groomed and shook and looked
around sharply and did it again
and again, before she pulled out
a long worm from the very edge
of the bank, looked around before
swallowing and flying away.
I'm quite sure she was a black
angel as she tries to hide her beauty,
by bathing only when alone and by
masking her voice with that horrible
caw. I earned the right to watch
her bathe by being quiet and alone
in this country which pretends it is only suited
for caws. She only really speaks in whispers.
She says it is time to remember the secrets
and tell them.

Donna Thompson

Cows of God

In the spring of my thirty-fifth year, halfway between Jacobs Corner and Grimsley on Highway 53, I saw God for the second time in my life.

It was a cool night in April, the night I came home from a three-day conference on acid rain to find that Caroline had left me. "Sorry," the note on the kitchen table said, "This just isn't working." Dammit, I thought. The rain forests are being slaughtered in Brazil, the ozone layer is getting critical, and now Caroline calls it quits. Great timing, babe. I dug around under the blanket of newspapers she had left on the lining room floor until I found the phone, and called my best friend.

"Wes," I said, "you in the mood for a mid-life crisis tonight?"

Wes said he would be over as quick as he could, and I waited. That first half-hour I spent in a full lotus on the carpet, tracing the circular patterns of the grillwork in front of the fireplace over and over in my mind, thinking thoughts of forgiveness in cool colors of blue and green. The next thirty minutes, I lit a fire and burned every picture of her within reach, every piece of junk mail with her name on it, and that damn note she had left, which I condemned as hopelessly vague. *What* wasn't working? We had just filed suit against the U.S. Forest Service—she had helped me with the paperwork. Our boycott of stores that sold furs had been featured on page sixteen of the Sunday paper. We'd made love just a few nights before, argued about whose turn it was to take out the garbage, packed my suitcase together the morning I had left.

Another few minutes passed, and I admitted I understood the note. After two years of marriage, Caroline and I had worn the polish off each other until the dents and scratches were painfully visible. When was the last time I had told her I loved her, and meant it? I couldn't remember. When was the last time she had told me? I couldn't remember that, either. Instead I thought of the dirty dishes she habitually left in the sink, the way she fussed if her hair got wet in the rain. Even after we were married, she continued to use makeup produced by companies known to violate animal rights, and when I confronted her with a hamburger wrapper I found under the seat of her car, she admitted she was eating meat behind my back.

Caroline, meanwhile, complained that I spent more time in jail than I did with her, which was an exaggeration, of course. "Martyr!" she had shouted when I told her I had postponed—and I did say postponed, not canceled—our second honeymoon in favor of an important anti-nuke rally. Later, in the middle of a wonderful documentary about Peregrine falcons, she had thrown a pillow at the television and snapped, "Just once, I'd like to be with someone who sees a little beauty in *human beings!*"

I told myself she was just tired, urged her to take more vitamins. But over time the tiny darts she threw with such enthusiasm started to stick in the back of my neck. The month before, we'd been driving home from a rendezvous of environmental action groups where we'd heard lectures on how to spike trees, set fire to bulldozers, and lobby effectively in Congress. Caroline hadn't wanted to go, but she'd consented after I agreed to stop and let her visit an old college chum in Phoenix. I thought it would do her good to have coffee with an old friend, but I was wrong. Maybe I did too much of the talking. When I looked at Caroline, her knuckles were white against the blue china of her cup. As soon as we were alone, she spoke through lips drawn tight and bloodless.

"You've turned into one of those horribly sincere old ladies, dragging out your causes like pictures of your grandchildren," she said. "Nobody wants to see them, but you keep insisting."

Waiting for Wes in that wasteland of a living room, I started wondering if Caroline could be right. I went into my study and stared at the neat rows of environmental law books on my desk, the photocopies of press releases that awaited filing, the shoe box of scribbled notes and brilliant ideas that were now indecipherable. I looked at the poster of Chief Joseph on the wall. He sat defiantly on horseback, his face painted in bright war colors, but his eyes were dark and turned away. Those eyes had seen the Nez Perce fight bravely and brilliantly, and lose. The world was ruled not by reason or justice but by greedy men driving German cars, and nothing was going to change that. My stinging letters to the editor, my phone calls to the secretaries of politicians, the yellowing newspapers I had been collecting in the back seat of my car for months—all this wasn't making a damn bit of difference in the world.

That's the frame of mind I was in when Wes banged on the door.

"Sorry I'm late," he said. He looked me over and seemed satisfied that I had not yet slit my wrists. "Same old ball game, eh?"

"Strike two," I said. My first marriage, back in the days when I lived in a cabin in the Rockies, had lasted all of eight months. She had been a nice girl who had broken down and cried when I told her the solar cells simply couldn't power her blow dryer.

"Any chance Caroline will reconsider, maybe come limping home?"

"I doubt it," I said. "She took her waterbed. You know what a pain those things are to move."

Wes nodded. His own wife had run off to Utah with his dentist. The past December they had sent him a Christmas card with a picture of Santa holding a gigantic toothbrush.

We'd been friends for a long time, Wes and I. Our lives, Wes claimed, were wired in parallel; he'd even plotted our biorhythms once on the same chart to prove it. We'd grown up across the street from each other, traded secrets about junior high school girls, been arrested together for pulling up survey stakes on an oil lease in California. We had our history, our traditions. And when one of us came home bleeding, we inevitably drove out to the same place, the Bugaboo Lounge on Highway 53.

"You can get drunk if you like," Wes said when we got to the Bugaboo. "I think one of us should."

He looked around in the dim, smoky glow of the room, tested the stickiness

of the table top with a forearm, and nodded in satisfaction. At the bar, three women sat like cans on a fence, waiting to be picked off. In a dark corner, a man was slumped with a cowboy hat over his face, one hand still clutching a half empty mug.

"Wes," I said, "you ever feel like the Japanese soldier who crawled out of the cave and discovered the war was lost twenty years ago?"

"You need a vacation," he said. "You spend too much time handing out petitions in dark hallways, and not enough time in the sunlight. You can't photosynthesize without sunlight. You know that!"

"I'm just sick of it," I said. "Sick of *me*, driving down to City Hall in my gas guzzler to demand cleaner air, with a lunch packed in those non-biodegradable plastic baggies that are so damn convenient."

There was a long silence. Wes started peeling the label off his beer bottle.

"You know she refused to recycle," I said. "Wouldn't separate the paper from the plastics!"

"If you'd listened to me," Wes said, "this could all have been avoided."

It was true. "Marry her?" Wes had protested when I told him that Caroline and I were engaged. "We're talking about the same girl? The one who gave you a plastic plant for your birthday?"

"She's willing to learn," I said, but Wes had continued to stare at me with the bewilderment of a mother whose son was about to marry outside the faith.

"Hey," he said now. "I wish it could have worked out. You know that." I could tell he was sincere, and it made me uncomfortable. It made us both uncomfortable, I think. When he got to the part about if there was anything he could do, I told him there was one thing.

"Get me some pretzels from the bar," I said.

He gave me a solemn glance as he pushed back in his chair. "Listen," he advised, "just drink your beer and don't even think about Caroline."

God, Caroline. For a moment I was back in a pancake house in Oregon, gazing out the window at logging trucks that rumbled past trailing great shrouds of dust. Men in baseball caps and heavy boots hunched over the counter and stared into their cigarette smoke. When Caroline came out of the rest room, there was a long wolf whistle. Every stool at the counter swiveled, and there she stood, stuffed into those jeans she could barely zip up, wearing that pink shirt she'd bought in Las Vegas, no bra. She smiled, walked right up to the ape who had whistled and leaned close, like she was about to whisper in his ear. Then she slapped him, slapped him hard and walked away, wiggling her hips.

Wes came back with the pretzels and I tried to tell him about that morning in Oregon, how I had admired her, how gloriously oblivious I had been to the differences between us, but he wouldn't pay attention. He kept looking at the

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In the spring of my thirty-fifth year, halfway between Jacob Corner andGrimsley on Highway 53, I saw God for the first time in my life.

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bar, where the closest of the three women, a skinny blonde with too much makeup, sat tapping her cowboy boots as if she were keeping time to a song nobody else could hear.

"You didn't see it, did you?" Wes said. "You really didn't see it."

"See what?"

"She winked at you."

My face must have turned white or something because suddenly Wes couldn't look at me. He picked up a pretzel and held it up to the light, then took off his glasses and pretended to clean them. Finally he put his hand on my shoulder. "It's okay," he said. "I was joking."

And from then on, it *was* okay. Wes had forced me to confront my Medusa. Despite any precautions I might take, I knew that the whole mess could happen again: the ridiculous overconfidence of love, when suddenly a man is willing to believe in the Easter Bunny all over again, followed by a short period of dangerous bliss, and then the inevitable dirty dishes in the sink. And so, recognizing our weakness in the face of temptation, vowing to take it one day at a time, Wes and I solemnly touched beer bottles and swore off women forever.

I don't mean we actually believed it. It just helped to pretend.

"Willpower," Wes said. "That's the secret." We had given up on the Bugaboo and were driving home.

"From here on out, it's just you and me, pal," I said. "We'll run together like a couple of lone wolves."

A sign flashed by, alerting us to the friendly banking efficiency of First Federal at Grimsley, and then, right there, we saw them.

"What the hell!" Wes exclaimed. He pushed away from the wheel and arched his back to stomp on the brakes. The truck slid diagonally down the road to a stop. In front of us, dark shapes moved swiftly through our headlights.

"Cows!" I said. "Look at them!"

Running across the road were dozens of cattle, black cows with no trace markings. They appeared out of the darkness on the right side of the road, jumping casually over the guardrail two or three abreast. Then they trotted across the asphalt and disappeared down a gravel road.

"Not just ordinary cows," Wes whispered. "Black Ninja Cows!"

I suppose that up to that point in my life, I had taken cows pretty much for granted. The cattle I knew had been sleepy monoliths by the road who stopped chewing just long enough to turn their heads and watch me pass. On hot days, they'd be lying in the shade with their front legs folded neatly underneath them. The cattle I saw now were nothing like that. Not one animal paused, not one gave us a glance. These were cows moving with a purpose, guided animal missiles, their eyes locked on some distant target. As quickly as they had appeared, the last animal trotted into the night.

I don't know how long we sat there, staring down the deserted highway, Wes's truck idling roughly. Then Wes let out a sigh, as if he'd been holding his breath for a long time.

"Black Ninjas," he repeated, slumping down in the seat. "A secret

breed of attack cow developed for military purposes." He was trying to make a joke, but his voice had the funny hint of a question in it, as if anything he said, no matter how outrageous, might somehow be true. Suddenly he sat up straight. "I've got it!" he said. "Suppose that there's some kind of intoxicant in the air—nitrogen, or something—that keeps every animal on earth in a stupor. Only we think it's normal. See, we're drunk all the time, and don't know it."

"And?"

"And this breed of cow is immune to that intoxicant, or maybe they accidentally ate some of the antidote."

That was Wes, coming up with some new age theory just when you'd experienced something fantastic and beautiful. The trouble was, I didn't have a better explanation. I've told this story to some people who stop me right here and say, did you ever think a farmer might have left a gate open? They wouldn't say that if they'd seen these cows. These looked like cows who had opened the gate themselves.

"Maybe it's an earthquake," Wes said, peering into the darkness. "Animals are in tune to that kind of energy."

"Wes," I said, "don't get carried—"

"UFOs!" he blurted. "Flying saucers land, and alien cows spill out of them! Chariots of the Gods, with cows at the wheel! Easter Island! Stonehenge! All built by cows!"

He went on, but I wasn't listening. I was thinking about a time when I was four or five years old. My mother had taken me to church, back in the days when the priests still read mass in Latin. I remembered how tiny my hand looked in hers, the swish of her black dress when it brushed against the red velvet of the pews. When I heard a deep, rhythmic voice from the front of the cathedral, I thought God Himself was speaking. The worst part was, I didn't understand a word He was saying.

I couldn't explain why at the time, but that memory had clicked on in my head when I'd seen those cows moving like an army in front of us. And that same feeling I'd had on that day was back: the recognition that something huge and secret and wonderful was being revealed in front of me, if only I could comprehend it. I think Wes must have felt the same.

"Hang on," he sad. "We're going after those cows!"

Wes swung the truck hard onto the side road, sliding the rear end on the gravel. It had rained during the day and there were puddles and patches of mud on the road. Wes crouched over the wheel, eyes ahead, saying nothing. The only sounds were the whine of the truck's engine and the irregular thump of gravel against the floorboards.

We raced down a long hill with barbed wire fences running along each side of the road. The cattle could not have turned, and I wondered how they had gotten so far ahead. Then the reflective tags of a mailbox appeared on the right, and I had to grab the door handle to keep my balance as we slid to a stop.

"Maybe it's an earthquake," Wes said, peering into the darkness. "Animals are in tune to that kind of energy."

"I don't see them," I said.

"There!" Wes countered. Against the lights of a farmhouse, I saw large dark shapes moving in the distance. Wes brought the column shift down hard and spun the tires, but it wasn't necessary. By the time we got up the gravel drive, the cattle were gathered peacefully around the house. Wes looked at me, shrugged, and very carefully opened his door. Silently, one calculated step at a time, we got out of the truck and moved forward. But the animals we saw, jet black and unmarked as before, were somehow transformed. In the yellow light of the porch, they were nothing more than ordinary cattle. A few had their heads over a fence and were chewing on what looked to be soybeans.

For a moment both Wes and I stood there, feeling like idiots. Inside the house, a dog started barking.

"These people should know you can't let cattle run loose like that," Wes said. "There ought to be a leash law, or something."

"Let's go," I said, but Wes was already moving toward the house. I stood there for half a second, cursed, and then followed him onto a wooden porch where light blue paint had been worn to bare boards. The front door was ajar, and we stood looking through a screen into the living room, where a television babbled quietly to itself about the wonders of a breakfast cereal. Somewhere in the back of the house, the dog was still barking.

"Wes!" I whispered. "It's late. Let's forget it."

"Hello!" he called. "Knock knock!"

There was a sound like pots and pans hitting the floor, and then I saw a hand slap against the stained wood of the doorframe across the room. A woman staggered into view. Her eyes were huge and her mouth opened and closed like a fish; her lips were a horrible shade of purple. She stumbled toward us, still moving those lips soundlessly, her hands now grasping at her throat. As she stared at us and we stared back, it finally occurred to me that she was choking to death.

Before I knew what I was doing, I was inside the room, wrapping my arms around her from behind, pressing my fist to her stomach and thrusting upward. She convulsed, coughed, and stood doubled over, rocking back and forth as she gasped for breath. A horrible glob of half-chewed flesh was on the floor in front of us.

"The Heimlich maneuver!" Wes said, his voice barely audible. "My god, you just saved her life!"

The woman's breath now came in long, deep wheezes. I stood not knowing where to move or what to say, my heart bouncing like a tennis ball against my chest. I started to go get her a glass of water, but just as I moved, she straightened and spoke.

"Who are you?" she said, then coughed again.

I dug out my drivers license, and showed her my Sierra Club card. That seemed to help. People assume that if you're a member of the Sierra Club, you're a nice person. Then I told her how we'd seen the renegade cows

crossing the road, and how we'd followed.

"Cows?" the woman asked. Her lips were returning to what could pass for a normal color, and I realized that she was an attractive young woman, a wholesome looking farm girl. She was wearing a blue checked dress like my mother used to have, an old fashioned kind of thing, but pretty. In one fist she still clutched a napkin. As I watched, her fingers relaxed—I happened to notice there was no wedding ring—and the napkin slipped to the floor.

We found out that her name was Debbie, that she and her two sons lived alone on a hundred acres, that the boys were sleeping over with a friend, that she'd been reading and was just getting around to having some leftovers, that her husband had run off taking the pickup and the savings account with him and the bank was getting nasty. Once she got her wind, we couldn't slow her down.

"Cosmic!" Wes said. "It's like those cows led us here deliberately, like they knew!"

"Sure," I said. "And next you're going to tell me they're going to stick around and help save the farm."

"Well, why not?"

It didn't turn out that way, of course. The next morning the paper ran a picture of an eighteen wheeler on its side in a pasture, which explained how the cattle got loose. A rancher came that afternoon and spent the rest of the day gathering his stock. A month later the bank foreclosed and Debbie was given three days to vacate the property. She and the boys ended up moving in with Wes, and the last I heard they were all up in Alaska, chaining themselves to trees.

Of course, I didn't know any of that then.

All I knew then was that Wes was having coffee in the kitchen with Debbie, explaining the global advantages of vegetarianism. I had walked out into the yard and stood with my arms crossed, watching the cows grazing quietly. The sky had almost cleared and a nearly full moon cast everything in shades of grays and blues.

I was trying to think of a time when I didn't know so much about the world and how it worked, when the news that an American corporation had dumped toxic sludge on a Caribbean beach could still bring me to a healthy rage instead of compounding my depression. Everything Caroline had said was true. When success eluded me, I had sought disappointment. The more hopeless the cause, the more likely I was to devote my life to it. The next thing I knew, I would be driving a truck full of dynamite, heading for the Washington monument.

Alone out there in the darkness, I did my best to feel sorry for myself, but I kept coming back to the cattle, and how they had led us to this particular house.

"Coincidence," I said aloud, to the house and the fence and the moon. As soon as I said it, I knew I was not alone. Right next to me, though I could not understand how it had crept up without my notice, was a large, black cow. I found out later that male cattle are called bulls—and I had a feeling that it was male next to me, a sort of sympathy I sensed between us—but that's beside the point. To me it was just a cow, standing there at a polite but social distance as if the two of us were strangers waiting for a bus. Its mouth moved in rhythmic, soothing motions.

I wasn't soothed. The quiet satisfaction of cattle has always troubled me. I've never been able to shake the annoying suspicion that they know something I don't.

"What's up, pal?" I said. "Out for a stroll? Maybe pondering the meaning of existence?"

I can't say the animal was particularly attentive, but it did stop chewing.

"I mean," I said, "you do know what it's all about, don't you? They haven't told you? Well, for starters, they're going to feed you more than you really should eat, and you're going to eat it, because you don't know any better. You'll get nice and fat. Finally they'll take you to a building and smash in your skull. But you want to know the best part? Yeah? Well, just before they put that hammer to your forehead, your wife, the lovely Mrs. Cow, is going to pop in and say, I'm so sorry, dearest, but this just isn't working!"

The cow stood there, listening, maybe dozing, I didn't know which.

"So you tell me," I said, leaning closer, "if that's life, why bother? Why go to the trouble?"

Something must have registered, because the animal swung its big head around and looked right at me.

I looked back into those huge eyes and they answered my question. Right then, for just one tiny piece of a moment, I thought I saw God for the second time in my life. Only this time, there was no mistake. This time, I didn't need my mother to explain it to me. In that instant, as I floated in those bottomless, innocent eyes, I saw black sludge evaporating magically from the white sand of a beach. I saw virgin timber pushing through the stumps on clear cut hills, shooting into the sky. I wanted to throw my arms out and pull this world around me, but the moment was over.

I blinked and looked at the cow, who looked calmly back at me. Maybe, I thought. Just maybe. If not in my lifetime, perhaps in someone else's. Something ran down my cheek and I realized I was crying.

"I've been an idiot," I said. "Thanks for speaking English this time."

People say to me, if you really saw God inside that cow, did you fall to your knees in front of it? Did you build a temple on that spot, the shrine of the holy cow? And then they get nervous when they see I'm serious, and don't wait around for me to tell them they've just missed the whole point.

I didn't run off to India or become a priest or start handing out bibles on street corners. I got home and went to bed, and the next day I went downtown to picket the local furrier. By bicycle, that is. I sold my car, got out my backpack, and started doing my laundry by hand with biodegradable soap, like I had ten years before. I went to the mountains and swam in an alpine lake and afterwards just stood there in the sunlight with my arms opened wide.

I've been in and out of love all my life, and I can tell you, being in love is better.

Rodger Ling

Me

I was born in the yellow throat
of a day lily and in the dark
red bellies of my parents.
I was in the wombs of roses,
the American Beauty,
the Hawaii hybrid tea.
I lay in pollen dust,
and in the small salty sea
of my mother's oxygen.
I drifted for months,
smelling of nectar and blood,
and when I came out, I couldn't
tell which dark face greeted me,
my mother or the sun.

Mary Weir

He Often Suggests A More Distant Space

What the painter sees, daylight covers;
a solid mass of stone, an overlapping
delicate brance, no movement in the still air,
no shadow in the even light. This light
won't bend or dim, there's no need of science.
Surely the painter slept one night alone
in his garden and woke
at dawn to a light not gleaming on
but glowing from the silver leaves of olives?
A more distant space: but add shadows, add the sun
as source, and recognize your own backyard,
the summer place you know only too well
in the familiar light of waves and particles,
of dust, of working and dying by daylight.

Jenn Brown

To an Addict on Jekyll Island

Early morning, the shrimp boats
are already there. I said
they look like manless skeletons
haunting the Atlantic. You shrugged
just doing their job.
You would say something like that and
then stare out—leaning on the pier railing
for hours. I decided not to speak
again and imagined to myself
how they gathered their boneless cargo
which would be shelled and de-veined
and then do it again the next day
and the next. I thought how time
by its regularity stands still.

Once, I thought you meant
to break the silence when you asked
Why do they only plow
the rough waters? But you didn't
need an answer and the silence
was only darkened like the sky
that was gradually being snuffed out
by the thick gray clouds
pouring in from the water.

I saw how your lean body looked
to be in its right place on the pier,
with that pale skin hugging tightly conspicuous
bones. You didn't bother to hide
the bluish holes scattered on the undersides
of both arms—even on those pliable
places between your long fingers.

I can't say for how long I watched you—
searched for you far out to sea—
from your glassy eyes back, or rather,
somehow run aground—stilled—
in a terribly shallow water.

Donna Thompson

The Love Song of Doctor Sardonicus

The time has come, I think, for me to rule the world;
you ask me, what will I change?
I will make it so roosters crow everywhere.
The whole world will have to rise at dawn.

You ask me, what will I change?
Just a few short zaps of my death ray, and
the whole world will have to rise, at dawn,
to answer my summons as one.

Just a few short zaps of my death ray and
the sky will open its long sealed eye, waiting until now
to answer my summons, as one
waking from a sleep beneath the ground;

the sky will open its long-sealed eye, waiting until now,
as if the judgement has arrived, the people
waking from a sleep beneath the ground.
And I, the guilty one, resigned to this

burden. Of all the far-sighted, the visionaries, only I
have passed word on my actions: so many dead,
and I , the guilty one, resigned to this
burden. Of all the far-sighted, the visionaries, only I

have passed word on my actions: so many dead,
so soon, to make a better world; this is the
burden of all the far-sighted, the visionaries. Only, I
wish it were not so necessary,

so soon, to make a better world. This is the
time when great things finish, when we all
wish it were not so necessary
to rise in the morning. After all, the night is a

time when great things finish, when we all
stretch the wasted end of one day and dread
to rise in the morning after, all the night. Is a
darker life needed in darkness, you ask me, to

stretch the wasted end of one day and dread
the death-ray in the morning? I will make the
darker life needed. In darkness, you ask me to
lie down, my dear, give this bright mind to

the death-ray, in the morning. I will make the
oceans boil, the skies; visions enter all, in your memory.
Lie down, my dear, give this bright mind to
the brightness of my vision, your life, for mine.

Oceans boil, the skies' visions enter, all in your memory.
The time has come, I think, for me to rule the world.
The brightness of my vision: your life for mine.
I will make it so roosters crow everywhere.

Greg Delisle

Untitled

I would tell you what
I am thinking, but
You might believe me
And answer back.
I might see a little
Yellow-haired girl
Floating leaves in
Rain puddles and think that
She is possibly an angel.
She doesn't see her reflection
Spreading away from her feet,
But she is perfectly aware
Of the oceans and islands
Forming from her tiny wet hands.
But all I will tell you is
Her mother is going to be angry
Because her shoes are dirty now.

Kris Ballinger

Volunteering

The crux of a star
is not the hot center
nor its appearance
across black time,
It is in the fact
that it is there a tall
like ourselves, chlorophyll,
water.
A star doesn't have to be.
Nothingness is equally
acceptable. In this
is located anything you
can think of, even
yourself locked in black
time,
looking at stars
as if you had the sense
to comprehend just one
phenomenon.

Mary Weir

The Comb Was Not Mine and I Had to Leave It

It is mapped out, the short windy day and the waiting street.
I must pack a little and find the red comb.
The one with the hair in it, the long hair
stuck in it, fallen when I turned and,
grasping a towel to me, brushed the counter.
The red comb is here on the wet tile
by the wastebasket. I have to wipe it
with a wet cloth, as a toreador wipes the hair oil
from his comb. I reach for the cloth under the sink,
from the pipe's elbow. The sink
meditatively perches above, and now I lean close
to the high mirror. The clean comb makes ridges in my hair.
I have already made the straight line in it, the promise.

Cathy Wagner

Interview: William Matthews and Stanley Plumly

William Matthews' latest book of poems is Blues If You Want. *He lives in Manhattan and teaches creative writing at the City University of New York. Stanley Plumly teaches at the University of Maryland, and his latest book is called* The Boy On the Step. *This interview was conducted at breakfast during the Meacham Writers' Conference by Yvonne Hart and Khaled Mattawa.*

SR: Do you both do a lot of translation?

WM: Yes, I do. I'm a reluctant translator in the sense that I wouldn't want to do it full time, and twice now, and I perceive a third bout of this, I've run across poems that I like so much and for which there were no adequate translations, and so I decided that I would do it.

SR: What language?

WM: The first book was from French, and this one's from Latin.

SR: Horace?

WM: No, Martial. The Horace, I think, will be number three.

SR: How does translating affect your work? Do you do it as a way of getting at something for yourself to write?

WM: No, I think there are all kinds of benefits to me from it, but I don't know what they are, or they come so long after the fact that it's like hearing people give accounts of important parts of their lives when those parts of their lives are in the semi-distant past, and the story has become so rationalized and sleek and smooth all the impulsive irrational tracemaking is left out—it sounds like they did it on a *Consumer Reports* basis or like "I married her because X, and I divorced her because Y." When in fact, none of those things really happened; it's like deep irrational swerves and affiliations and so forth; and I think in some ways that whatever benefits you get from it work like that: you don't know what they are. And by the time you're in a position to guess what they might be, they're so distant that your description of them is very rationalized and probably untrustworthy.

The one practical benefit of it is that I like to have two things to work on at the same time. If I'm pursuing in this dreadful bloodhound way a poem I'm working on, and it's not going anywhere, I can set it aside and do something else. Then you can go back to what you're working on from a different angle—you haven't been thinking about it, you've been doing something else and it makes it much easier.

The last book of poems, I was working on a book of essays at the same time—it doesn't have to be translations. In fact I'd rather it not be, because I think translation's very difficult.

SR: You've done essays about other people's poetry.

WM: I have an essay on Stan's [Plumly's] work, for example.

SR: Is reading for translating the same kind of reading, careful reading, or is it a different kind of reading?

WM: I think it's very different when you're reading something that you've decided you're going to try to translate. I don't sit around and read poetry in Latin for amusement a lot. And if I were doing it just to remind myself of what a poem was like, I would be in fact translating like mad in my head as I was reading the Latin—I'd be translating it phrase by phrase. But if you're going to translate it the longer you can delay that, the longer you can try to stay in the original language, the better.

The first thing you'd like to do is to try and know it from the inside, in its original language, and if you're going to translate you almost artificially refuse to translate until later.

SP: Poets who translate well are those poets who gravitate toward another language that speaks to them, speaks to their work. Translation is another way of thinking about their work, having affection for that kind of, not quite a doppelganger, but at least a poet in line with their own aesthetic.

WM: Yeah, I do think the choice of poets to translate is deeply irrational. It's a kind of erotic decision, and often does result in discovering or uncovering some part of your own psyche that isn't your own imagination, that was a little harder to get to by any other way but by this triangulated way.

SR: Do you consider the final product your work? Do you say, "This is really my poem as well"?

WM: Well, it's my work in a sense. I recently had an experience—I sent some of these translations to an editor Stan and I know well. He wrote back and said, "I wish you would not waste your time doing this. Your work is far more important." And I thought, that would be news to Martial, who has been consistently readable for two thousand years. The notion that this was somehow separate from my work is naive—there is a way in which it is part of my work. It's something I spend a lot of affection on.

It's probably not my handiwork, because you really do have to try to be accurate. You are constricted in some ways. And in the case of somebody like Martial, who wrote a certain number of poems flattering the emperor at different times in his career, for political and social reasons. Those are poems I simply cannot translate. I don't live in that world—I'm not saying I wouldn't have behaved exactly the way he did if I were alive then, it's just it's unthinkable.

SR: How much liberty do you take when you're doing a translation? You know, you read translations that are completely unlike the original . . .

WM: There's a kind of argument, if you will, to which you must be faithful, and there's a linguistic texture. This becomes tricky, because for example

Martial's epigrams in Latin are very brief and unrhymed. There are lots of parallelisms and lots of pairing and repetitions, to which we in a word-order language can't respond at that level. I find myself using endrhyme doing these translations a lot, though I'm not particularly attracted to it when I'm writing my own poems. That's because that sense of repetition of pattern and things coming around again must be registered somehow, so the rhymes are both faithful to something in the Latin and are complete invention out of English.

One poem is about a guy who sold a slave in order to pay for an expensive dinner. The joke at the end of the poem is "that wasn't a fish we ate last night, that was a man." The sense of the sting in the tail, the last word of the poem, makes everything come together. It's there in Latin, and if you don't have a rhyme or something like it, you don't have that sense of a whole, of the locks locking shut, and you haven't translated the poem. And yet the rhetorical structure you use in English is one that didn't even exist in Latin.

SR: Your work is often described as witty—the backs of your books, the quotes always mention your wit. Are you tired of hearing that?

WM: I'm a little bored by the assumption that wit or humor in the larger sense, almost in an Elizabethan sense, somehow separates emotion from the expression of emotion. It seems to me that wit is an expression of an emotion, not an alternate mode of being in the world.

SR: There's a line in one of your poems, "you were talking, wouldn't you know it, about art," and there's a sense that you're mixing the serious with a kind of an undercutting—your speaker has a tendency to want to be taken seriously but at the same time wanting not to sound pompous.

WM: Yes, I think the speaker of that poem wants to be serious but doesn't what to be caught taking himself seriously, if that makes any sense. While we're in the vicinity, the idea I would think to mention is that nothing is quite so funny as people taking themselves seriously. The minute you're trying to be serious, you need protection against being a pompous ass. It comes quite naturally into the poem.

SR: What is your defense of poetry?

WM: Against what attack? If there were enough people who cared about it enough to attack it, I would feel happier than I sometimes do!

SR: Why write poetry?

SP: If that's the question, I'm always amazed at the number of people, for example this past weekend, who make tremendous sacrifices to do it. I'm always impressed. I guess I never stop being surprised; I didn't grow up in a literary culture, books were not valued, so it's an amazing thing. It's its own defense then.

WM: I think poetry has a peculiar position. In a funny way it has a lot of prestige in th culture, and nobody—numerically speaking—goes out daily and manifests the source of this prestige. Book sales are not high, etc. But I think Stan is exactly right, that the source of the prestige is how much emotional weight people are willing to give it, and a gathering like this one is in some ways exactly the evidence.

SR: A guy that went to one of the readings--he was required to go by one of his classes—I asked whether he enjoyed it, and he said, "No. I don't like poetry. It's much too personal."

WM: He must have the same complaint about life!

SR: Is part of the issue of being a poet the idea of not wanting to be taken too seriously?

WM: I'm sure there are historical impingements on me, but I'm really not speaking of historical aesthetics, I'm speaking of my own temperament, that in some way I want to address things quite seriously. But I also think that addressing things quite seriously is faintly ludicrous. I'm trying to get a balance between the two in order that I can, as opposed to this poor spectator, take my life personally, but not be an idiot about it. Sure, I'm a captive of my historical era in some way, but I'm not aware of this being a response to any historical or aesthetic issue. It's a very personal way of trying to keep on balance.

SR: I think this comment is revealing in some ways. I was just noticing that some of the poems the graduate students had were in the first person. How much can you do with the personal to address large issues?

WM: Often the "I"—this is especially true as the poet grows more sophisticated—is a character; the "I" is not the poet, but a character made to represent a complex of things.

SR: The poet's alter ego?

WM: The first person, in a comparatively sophisticated poem, is a character. It's true that in some ways Huck Finn is an alter ego for Mark Twain, but in other ways he is entirely separate.

SR: How does humor work? That's something that's really hard to get at in poetry because people aren't expecting it. Poetry is to be "serious".

SP: There's a wonderful serious and funny poet, Charles Simic, and there is James Tate, who is crazy and funny, but the poets who are often the funniest are those you'd least expect. I think Galway Kinnell is a very funny poet. And Jim Wright is great that way.

WM: Yes, yes, absolutely. And it's partly Galway's penchant for writing only about death, sex, mortality, what it's like to raise children and have them grow up and grow away from you. Galway is very committed to never writing about "casual" subject matter. It's one of his superstitions as a writer, that that's the way he does it. And yet

the closer he gets to those deeply serious topics, the more it's like people whistling in the dark when they go by graveyards. Seriousness attracts humor.

SP: In a way, all poems are funny. The question is, how funny will you allow it to be? How much will you allow it to present itself, its meaning, to be funny? Some poets who aren't vrey good will be funny in spite of themselves.

WM: The language makes a joke about the writer at that point.

SR: What are both of your philosophies on workshops?

WM: I don't think I have a philosophy of them; I have an experience of them. They're cumbersome and it's a strange fomat, to get that many people together to discuss something that is so much about privacy.

But my sense is that there is a lot of evidence that people really can learn something—I'm not sure that I know what the name of it is—that helps them write, that helps them take their work and their lives, ultimately, more seriously. Stan's a notoriously skillful and gifted teacher; you find somebody like that, and people will come away from those workshops grumbling, full of praise, complaining, and they'll say later on "I really learned a lot: and you'll say "What did you learn?" and they start immediately having the problem I'm having now.

But you know, the success of Phil Levine at Fresno State, the success of Theodore Roethke at the University of Washington, there are obviously instances of people who have been able to do something quite extraordinary with the workshop format.

SP: It's a tricky situation, I've always thought, because it's a social occasion when you're in a workshop, and that's why individual conferences are much more dispensable to the management of the social occasion. Otherwise there is a very artificial screen between you and the student, that you can negotiate around or break through—perhaps. Workshops are problematic, I've found, for those students whose work is not ont he dock for that day. You have to find ways of forcing their attention on things not theirs. That's a very important part of learning; it teaches them to look at their own work more dispassionately.

WM: In fact, it's often the part of the workshop from which they will learn the most, since they're paralyzed the times when their own poem is there. They become like a stage mother with a gifted child then—they just want to get the role. It's when they're looking at someone else's work that the kinds of intuitive grasps of how to process this come. But not everybody in the class knows that.

SR: Do you find that your better poets are your better critics?

SP: It'd be nice if it were always that way, but good writers can often be inarticulate when talking to other people about their poems. Usually the good responder is the person who is using up a lot of creative power in the act of criticizing.

The tricky thing about workshops is that they're not about writing, they're about reading and talking. Writing occurs somewhere else.

WM: Even those of us who are comparatively articulate are writers for a reason, and that's because when you say it, it's not good enough. That's why you put it down on paper. And at the other end of the scale you often can find students who are remarkably non-verbal for writers until you put a pen in his or her hand, and then pretty interesting things will happen.

SP: The tricky thing about workshops is that they're not about writing, they're about reading and talking. Writing occurs entirely somewhere else.

WM: Workshops are for revision.

SR: It seems that when I read a poem in a workshop, I'll read it and I'll think of all these things that I feel about a poem, and when I say them they're so off-base, nothing like what was going on inside my head.

WM: Well, there is no correct answer. It's like having a music school and everyone comes in and sits down and plays something dopey at the piano and walks away, and the sixth person hears something that makes them play something different; nobody got anything right, but the best people learned soemthing from it.

SP: I think the test for it is, is your work good? are you writing well? It doesn't matter whether you think you're sitting on something big now...you *will* get it, you're getting something.

SR: I feel a kind of need, always, in a workshop situation, to see what the instructor saw.

SP: Exactly, that's the social motive for wanting to be in a workshop.

SR: But I rarely find it.

WM: You want to be "mirrored", as psychologists say.

SR: It leaves me feeling like maybe I don't get poetry at all.

SP: What you're really saying is, you're verbalizing a response that doesn't seem to have, as Bill called it, a "mirror" in the group. Well, that could be the group; the group could be in error, or it could be the instructor.

WM: Maybe your superstition is that you write better if you're in left field, and you arrange to be there; if that helps you get your work done, then that's exactly what you should be doing.

A Devotion

Your pale ankles, God help you,
unsuspecting exorcists of any emotion;
as you stand up from the bed, the cover falls
away. I stay curled here, the sheets
wrinkled and creased like a relief
map of a war-scarred desert.

Look at me, my eyes are deserts,
my fists clenched to keep from peeling you
raw like a fruit, from drawing blood to relieve
the bad humors. You're a vacuum of emotion.
For days rain has poured in sheets,
beating down dust with the declining days of fall;

under the constant tattoo I've fallen
into routine. My words full of echoes as a deserted
house, piled like sheets
torn from countless books of fiction you
kept neatly shelved, a sign of your devotion.
God, when you left, everything breathed relief.

You must've loved it when this silence came to relieve
you. I can almost hear the denials as they fall
like onion tears without emotion;
I count them: sand in the desert.
May they bury you.
Leaving was like prying the sheets

of ice from a window. The silence which eats
furiously at daylight finds no relief
even in the cluttered city or you
singing as you pick your way without falling
through flooded streets. I won't desert
nor embrace this crazy motion

of yours away from me, from my weary emotions
as I wash and smooth the sheets,
placing things in order. You deserter!
I'm carved in your life like a relief;
witness this, if you can, the fall
of all the things that once held you.

Who said I'd never desert you?
Only emotion: wretched parasite! Such blessed relief
it will be to fall at last on clean sheets.

Jenn Brown

Beds of Dachau

If I tie yarn around the bed's slats maybe I'll feel as welcome here as when the Hmong tribe greeted my father by tying yarn over his arms. If I tie shoes to the bed will they disappear by morning? If I pull my sweater over my eyes I'll never see sins on children, nor how easily the daylight always reflects off bald heads. Can I hide in this bed and escape this clean? There are so many shoes in the room next to the showers; they're like graves waiting to be buried under snow. This slat bench they store me on is so like the beds all mothers give birth in. Why can't this yarn cover me and make me warm as when my mother hugged me? Can we do nothing but mourn?—we're not dead. I look across the pebbled yard every day. It's so blank, so clean, how can anything be this clean? Birth and its blood and mucus aren't this clean; life seeps into all sheets and blankets.

Sarah Wagner

Sugartits

Suzy, tongue in the mailslot,
yells

can I come in
are you decent

Suzy, in the most true way,
I am not; you see,
I am, we are, riding this big
profane horse, with horseflies and all,
profane bloody teeth, profane eyes. God,
Suzy, get me off this horse, stop these
blues blues blues.

Hey,
are you in there
or not?

Suzy, how can I be? I mean,
shit, *how can I be*, I am this cricket's sigh
in an army of tempests, I am this dried seed
in a firestorm of rhododendron, for Christ's sakes,
I am a salted slug in a tornado of rabid hares!

Christ, you bastard.
You are inane.

Suzy says,
You are this inane giant bastard.

Goddamn it, Suzy, Help! I yell. Goddamn you,
get this fucking house off of me!

Bradley Paul

Kites in the Attic

You remember her name, Leiper. Dressed
like a hag, she offered boiled jacket
potatoes for a snack, kept her retarded
niece, Doris, mostly inside the one-room
flat. Next door, the Kiefers fought
for domestic rights and Werner tortured
kittens born every few weeks in the same
old broken chair in their attic. Wild
ramblers grew into every window. Nobody
had any money but attended mass daily
to feel equal, though tight clothes
were a sure sign of prosperity. Our attic
held wooden slats with apples drying
and wood stacked against the rafters.
Baskets of chopped wood were hoisted
through the one-paned window in summer
and almost daily Doris begged for colored
wool, more wool, as if her existence
depended on it. Our parents blamed
neighbors for their failures, their need
for domestic fights and love-making
bolted doors couldn't keep quiet.
In this attic we built long-tailed kites,
knotted pieces of colored tissue
with string into butterflies, snitched
dried apples. Doris never knitted
anything. She would glare at her basket's
kaleidoscope to satisfy her pleasure-
crazed brain. These neat pastel houses
and gardens don't speak of the town
I left, progress having stepped forward
to the city walls. This town, once full
of mealybugs and roaches, where a spoon
full of powdered milk was a treat,
named religion and witches in one sentence,
had no need for change. But we children
watched the kite and its flaring tail,
called it our freedom by the way it leaned
into the sky, the way it could let go.

Helga Kidder

CONTRIBUTORS

Check out KRIS BALLINGER'S new instructional video "High Energy Particle Physics for Beginners". GERHARD BORCHERS is the proud promoter of Chattanooga's hot honky-tonk band Haw-Gwarsh. JENN BROWN--See Raschke, Victoria. GREG DELISLE was always suspected of being a ninny until he reached the Lazy L and confirmed his ninnyhood. MATT EVANS is the next James Bond, an advocate of free bees, and a freshman whose feet are really that big. JAMES FORTNEY--Don't touch his bag! YVONNE HART--banjo-plucking, Subaru-driving, BR-working, Loudon-living, Lyle Lovett-loving lady. DAVID HASSELHOFF--Avon Home Perm ad man, he is currently training Tommy "Big T" Davis for the Olympic hammer throw. HELGA KIDDER recently took us 4-wheeling and forced us to gulp down big quarts of King Cobra while jamming out to some early Sabbath. MICHAEL KIM is a professional cool guy. RODGER LING was last seen on the Quayle Trail lobbying to keep the Swedes' 172-mpg car engine under lock and key in order to save American jobs. MIKE LOVE has politely informed Dr. "Axle-Head" Fulton that he's going to "shut him down" at the Brainerd Optimist drag strip. KELLY McGOWAN--Hammer's nothing without her; hence the weird pants. Deeply involved in the Madonna assassination plot, ROBBY NICHOLS is one of the few who truly appreciates Martin's monster-goo art and the fact that Ralph Hood looks like Zeus. Wear a helmet when you're on your bike, BRADLEY PAUL, because you don't know who could be after you (especially with your adolescent dreams about other people's girlfriends). KRISTI POE is no relation so quit ravin' about it. VICTORIA RASCHKE is being groomed by Jenn Brown for the upcoming Miss Hawaiian Tropic Pageant, held in Boca Raton (ed. note: Spanish for "rat's mouth"), FL . THOMASON'S first name was lost in a fishing accident. DONNA THOMPSON is living off the royalties generated since her career as a Kung Fu Theatre actress. CATHY WAGNER, an avid Kool-Aid drinker and dart-thrower, wishes that some frat guy, preferably Matt Cory, would call her "pookie". SARAH WAGNER--turn-ons include bad teeth, stringy blond hair, needle marks in the chest, and a Don Knotts disposition. CYNTHIA WATSON is a Red Cross instructor in the delicate science of ear and nostril hair shaping for the elderly. When campus kingpin MARY WEIR says "Jump," SGA, ACE, and all three campus publications say, "Huh?"

We regret that we cannot publish all submissions. Contributors who have not had their submissions returned may contact our office at (615) 755-4294. We hope that the contributors and others will continue to submit their work in the future, and we look forward to the continued support of the campus and community. The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga does not discriminate against prospective or current students on the basis of sex, handicap, race, color, religion, or national origin pursuant to the requirements of Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972, the Rehabilitation of 1973, and other applicable statutes. Inquiries and charges of violation of this policy should be directed to Barbara Wofford, Director of Affirmative Action.